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AMERICAN LINGUISTICS IN 1852

By GEORGE GRANT MAC CURDY

In looking over the old letters at the residence of the late Mrs. Edward E. Salisbury in New Haven recently, there was found one from Wm. W. Turner to Professor Salisbury. In the hope that it may throw some light on the history of the development of American linguistics, I offer it herewith for publication :

Washington, Oct. 23d, 1852.

My dear Sir :

« The Rev. Cyrus Byington's Grammar of the Choctaw Language, which he has rewritten at my request with the hope of having it printed by the Smithsonian Institution, has been submitted for approval to yourself and Prof. Felton of Cambridge. Prof. Felton's opinion (a very favorable one) has been received, and we are now awaiting the result of your examination and the return of the MS.

« Mr. Byington is in New York waiting to begin the further revision & printing of the work, for which he has received the permission of the Board of Missions. It is intended that — in case the work goes on — I shall first carefully read over the MS. making & suggesting such alterations as may appear necessary, and sending it on in portions to Mr. Byington, who after the final revision will pass it into the hands of the printers. The proofs will also be sent to me ; so that everything will be done that can be under the circumstances to bring it out in a creditable manner. I should mention that the orthography will be altered to correspond with the Dakota Grammar & Dictionary.

« You will therefore please return the MS. as soon as you conveniently can to the Smithsonian Institution.

« How comes on the Oriental Society ? I have not heard or seen anything of the New Haven Meeting this month. Have you had one ? If so, I trust you will publish an account of it, that I and the other absentees may know what was done.

Very truly yours,

(Signed :) Wm. W. TURNER.

« Prof. Edw. E. Salisbury.

« P. S.—I need hardly assure you that I shall be glad to receive and profit by any suggestions that may occur to you in looking over Mr. Byington's MS. Prof. Felton justly objects to the term *negative voice* — of course it should be *negative form*. »

The Smithsonian Institution did not publish this work. The reasons for its failure so to do can only be surmised. It had however previously published the Dakota Grammar and Dictionary¹, to which Turner refers in his letter. Of the two distinguished professors, to whom the rewritten manuscript had been submitted, C. C. Felton was Professor of Greek Literature at Harvard and later (1860) became president of that college ; while Edward E. Salisbury was at the time Professor of Arabic and Sanskrit Languages and Literature in Yale College.

The original manuscript of the Rev.

1. Rev. S. R. Riggs. Smithsonian Contr. to Knowl., vol. IV.

Mr. Byington's Grammar of the Choctaw Language eventually came into possession of the Library of the American Philosophical Society; and in 1870 was edited by the late Professor Daniel G. Brinton¹, who in his introduction to the work states that Byington had also prepared a Choctaw dictionary of some 15,000 words (Pilling says about 16,000), the manuscript for which was still in possession of the Byington family in 1870. The Grammar re-appeared the following year in the Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society (vol. 11, pp. 317-367). The Dictionary, edited by John R. Swanton and Henry S. Halbert, appeared in 1915 as Bulletin 46 of the Bureau of American Ethnology, a portrait of Byington (who died in 1868) serving as a frontispiece.

A bibliography of Byington is to be found in James Constantine Pilling's Bibliography of the Muskogean Languages².

Professor Turner, author of the letter here quoted, was also a student of Indian Linguistics, as may be seen from his classification, with explanatory remarks, of vocabularies of North American Languages, which was pub-

lished in connection with Lieutenant A. W. Whipple's Reports of Explorations and Surveys³ to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi river to the Pacific ocean, made under the direction of the Secretary of War in 1853-54. It was while thus engaged that Turner became familiar with Byington's two important Choctaw linguistic studies — the Grammar and the Dictionary. By additions and corrections he likewise contributed materially to Hermann Ernst Ludewig's Literature of American Aboriginal Languages⁴.

Linguistic studies among the American Indians are no longer a monopoly of the missionary. Neither are the services of professors of Greek Literature or of the Oriental Languages required to pass upon present-day products of American linguistic researches. In this field, the specialist has at last come unto his own; and opportunities for publication are afforded not only through the Smithsonian Institution's Bureau of American Ethnology but also through various other channels, and lastly through the newly founded International Journal of American Linguistics.

1. Philadelphia. McCalla & Stavely, Printers, 237-9 Dock street.

2. Bull. no. 9, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., Washington, 1889.

3. Vol. III, Part 3.

4. London, Trübner and Co., 1858.